Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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LL-01					
Interview Title:					
LL-01███					
Date/Time:					
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NATO data collection and analysis practices in Afghanistan					
SIGAR Attendees:					
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Key Topics:					
• (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) • Data Politics • Displaced Population research • Other potential indicators to track					

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

Data Politics

- Recommends Clingendael – Megan Price article regarding the **politics of counting**
- **ISAF never trusted UNAMA to count civilian casualties**, so created a parallel structure for counting. The UN, however, didn't rely on ISAF being on the ground to count (while of course this is a requisite for ISAF counting), so B.P. considers UNAMA data more reliable
  - If ISAF guys not on the ground counting, then they are relying on ANSF to do the counting, which could not be trusted: difference between civilians and insurgents? Not always clear

- o Bottom line: we know that civilian casualties are a very important indicator to track, but we don't have a system in place to collect the data.
- **ISAC had data that they passed up to NATO decision makers to use, but it was cherry picked for optimism rather than comprehensively considered.** Politically, there was nothing more that ISAC could do to ensure an adoption of more nuanced data. Within the alliance was a diversity of views, but the **U.S. dominated NATO**
- NATO's spending in LDCs **distorts the local economy**, but we don't know how much or to what extent. Don't count it.
- **Need to trust in expertise:** you can't be an expert in every area that needs counting. Also can't duplicate all external experts counting efforts. ISAF had a lot of parallel civilian structures for data collection that were arguably duplicative and inefficient. Expertise is needed to show what does and what doesn't matter for collection and analytical focus.
- **ISAC hopes to ultimately leave their data sets on Afghanistan as a legacy so that another group does not in the future reinvent the wheel.**
- **Huge incentives for overly optimistic reporting regarding career promotion.** Therefore, **independent measurement is a lifeline** to help commanders escape the pressure of over-optimism.
  - o NATO Lessons Learned Center recommended an independent assessment of strategic capabilities. SHAPE says no, we have that in-house. This expertise that they refer to is of course not independent.
- **Aggregated tactical success is often dressed up as strategic success.**
- **Not enough reliance on objective indicators** (what is "well-being?" How is that supposed to be measured without considering objective indicators as proxies?)
- **Global indicators that make good headlines with their simplicity (ex. Corruption Index) are often not considered more deeply than their headline; underlying process is flawed.** The lack of data for a particular year, for instance, means that they revert to the last year for which it was collected . Therefore, a country that hasn't had data collected on it for several years may be artificially ranked higher than a country that has consistently had data represented.
- **Some statistics are static and won't die** even though no one can really point back to where they originated or the methodology behind them. You need expertise to refute this.
- **How do you coordinate for success if you don't practice for it?**
- **"Too big to fail" mentality of military**
- **Military "tyranny of conformity"**
- **Aggregated tactical successes conflated with strategic success**
- **The national statistical capacity of a country is very important and we ignored it in Afghanistan.** This is JUST, if not more, important than building the capacity of ANSF. We also need to consider why the Afghan government may not want a census for political reasons.

- **Survey design** of surveys used in Afghanistan did not show a lot of forethought to design for bias and cultural sensitivity. The technical expertise required to get them right and repeat them was missing.
- **Corroborative sources and repeatability** are key in sound data collection.

Displaced populations

- Asylum seeker number as an indicator for insecurity: some correlation with confidence in the future of the country
    - Has monthly data for asylum seekers entering EU 28 countries
- IDP figures more reliable than refugee/returnee figures
- Others of Concern are still unclear regarding methodology for determination and even definition

Other suggestions for indicators that ISAC tracks or would like to track, which others largely ignore

- Electricity coverage as a measure of industrial capacity; look at total amount of coverage and where. When the demand curve for electricity during the middle of the day moves closer to the demand curves for electricity during the morning and evening, this signals increased industrial capacity.
- Polio vaccination coverage
- Geospatial data for settlements, although in Afghan context representative population sampling even through triangulation probably won't be accurate enough. Focus groups may be more appropriate and useful.
    - Other possibilities for measuring population include "LandScan," a global algorithm that looks at shelter size and type to work out the population density spread for a country. However, for this to work properly, you need a total national population figure to work from.
- Geospatial data for irrigation, size of marketplaces, road completion and condition. Commented that the military should provide this as a free good to development organizations to improve their work. Most organizations can't afford to pay for access to commercial imagery.
- Availability of luxury goods
- Size of bazaars
- World Food Program price variability: if you improve transportation networks, for instance, food should be less expensive. Something ISAC measures using this data is how much wheat an average worker can buy through a day of labor.
- Cell phone usage data as a measure of disposable income; ISAC has not looked at this yet, but would like to.

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Recommended follow-up meetings/readings:

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

A Knock on the Door

Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow